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**NAVAL WAR COLLEGE
Newport, R.I.**

**BEYOND FORWARD NAVAL PRESENCE: ASSERTING AMERICAN MILITARY
POWER IN EAST ASIA**

by

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A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Joint Military Operations.

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

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10 May 2007

Abstract

Beyond forward naval presence: Asserting American military power in East Asia

As China's maritime strength and influence grows, U.S. forward naval presence alone may not be enough to deter them from regional, as well as global ambitions. U.S. forces must also regularly demonstrate their strength, capabilities, and resolve through show of force operations. Show of force operations, supported by robust information operations, that relay U.S. strength and resolve to the People's Republic of China (PRC), may prove effective in deterring PRC forces from challenging U.S. forces. Show of force operations will also send a clear signal to PRC leadership and to U.S. partners in the region that the United States intends to stay engaged militarily in the region.

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INTRODUCTION

Since World War II, the United States has maintained a forward naval presence in East Asia. To many Asian nations, this military presence acts as a guarantor of security in the region to ensure safe passage for commerce and maintain peace and stability among historically divisive nations. The People's Republic of China's (PRC's) national interests, however, diverge from the majority of Asian nations who see the United States Navy's presence as a stabilizer for the local economies. "Our forward presence both reassures local governments and obviates their need for larger military hedges."¹

Although Sino-U.S. trade relations have improved in recent years, the political and military landscape between the two nations still remains in question. The status of Taiwan is a point of tension between the two powers. Additionally, as China grows more and more dependent on overseas resources and maritime trade to maintain its current rate of economic development, it is seeking to expand its maritime territorial claims in the East China Sea (ECS) and the South China Sea (SCS). The PRC is developing a maritime strategy for the 21st Century that will protect their national interests independent of the United States.

With that in mind, the People's Liberation Army Navy's (PLAN's) goal in the 21st Century, as it grows in numbers and capabilities, is to become a formidable blue water force capable of protecting PRC maritime trade in the Pacific and the Indian Oceans, Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ's), and projecting power from their own shores. Ultimately, the PRC may attempt to demonstrate to the other Asian nations that they can provide the security they need for trade instead of the United States. There is currently a trend towards

¹ Thomas P.M. Barnett, "Asia: The Military-Market Link," *U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings* (January 2002): 55.

competition for alliances in the region and around the world.² This is a strategy the United States cannot endorse for their own security, as well as the security of Asian nations who depend upon American military presence in the region to provide them protection and security.

U.S. Naval Doctrine Publication (NDP) 1 defines forward presence as: “Maintaining forward deployed or stationed forces overseas to demonstrate national resolve, strengthen alliances, dissuade potential adversaries, and enhance the ability to respond quickly to contingency operations.”³ Based upon this definition, forward presence is conducted daily by U.S. Pacific Command’s forces in East Asia. “The United States enjoys healthier security relationships with virtually every Asian government than any two governments there enjoy with one another.”⁴

As China’s maritime strength and influence grows, however, U.S. forward naval presence alone may not be enough to deter the PRC from regional as well as global ambitions. U.S. forces must also regularly demonstrate their strength and resolve through show of force operations. The U.S. Department of Defense defines show of force as: “An operation designed to demonstrate U.S. resolve that involves increased visibility of U.S. deployed forces in an attempt to defuse a specific situation that, if allowed to continue, may be detrimental to U.S. interests or national objectives.”⁵

Show of force operations based upon this definition, supported by robust information operations, may prove effective in deterring PRC forces from challenging U.S. forces. Show

² U.S. Department of Defense, *The Military Power of the People’s Republic of China* (Washington, DC: Office of the Secretary of Defense, 2005), 2-3.

³ Chief of Naval Operations, *Naval Warfare*, Naval Doctrine Publication (NDP) 1 (Washington, DC: Department of the Navy, CNO, 19 March 1994), 73.

⁴ Thomas P.M. Barnett, “Asia: The Military-Market Link,” *U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings* (January 2002): 55.

⁵ U.S. Department of Defense, Department of Defense Dictionary (Washington, DC: Joint Doctrine Division, J7, 22 March 2007), <http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/jel/doddict/data/s/04920.html> (accessed on 18 April 2007).

of force operations will also send a clear signal to PRC leadership and to U.S. partners in the region that the United States intends to stay engaged in the region militarily and as a result reinforces the positive message that forward naval presence brings.

BACKGROUND

The PLAN is building a formidable, defensive force whose primary goal remains territorial claims with its secondary, long-term goal being an offensive force capable of projecting power as far as the Indian Ocean.⁶ In order to transform the force to an offensive power, the PLAN will have to focus on developing more capable guided missile destroyers (DDG's), nuclear submarines, and aircraft carriers. Many are already being developed and tested.⁷

DDG's are central to PLAN surface action groups (SAG). Modern PLAN DDG's have improved their air defense and anti-surface capabilities. This makes DDG's formidable platforms for sea denial and sea control missions.

The backbone of the PLAN is their submarine force, which is slowly transforming from a defensive patrol force to a medium and long range offensive force. Submarine launched anti-ship cruise missiles and more efficient nuclear reactor technology will extend both the range and capabilities of the 21st Century PLAN submarine fleet.⁸ Additionally, seaborne air defense capabilities have become more sophisticated in range and accuracy. Most of these trends are supported by Russian military sales and China's ability to reverse engineer imported technology.

⁶ Bernard D. Cole, *The Great Wall at Sea* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2001), 63-64.

⁷ Andrew S. Erickson and Andrew R. Wilson, "China's Aircraft Carrier Dilemma," *Naval War College Review*, 59 (Autumn 2006): 15.

⁸ Bernard D. Cole, *The Great Wall at Sea* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2001), 98.

There are also indications that China has an interest in acquiring or developing an aircraft carrier for its navy. China has purchased several aircraft carriers from Russia but none have been operational. A small carrier force would allow the PLAN to provide a forward presence far from China and possibly East Asia.⁹

These capabilities have already proven to assist China in their short term strategic objectives of protecting as well as expanding their territorial claims in the SCS and the ECS. The PLAN has already helped China in seizing the Paracel Islands and they are making progress in acquiring the Spratly Islands as well. Other regional ambitions include Taiwan and the Senkaku Islands.¹⁰

DDG's, nuclear submarines, and aircraft carriers would allow the PLAN to support these PRC national interests. In the future, the only force capable of challenging the PLAN may be the U.S. Navy. Competition for allies and resources may put China and the United States on opposite footing and may bring these two navies to a confrontation in the future. American resolve to stay engaged as the honest broker in East Asia will become even more critical to the stability of the region and the world.

Central to this task will be the United States Seventh Fleet homeported in Yokosuka, Japan. "A Policy Planning Staff study done under [George] Kennan's direction in the summer of 1948 concluded that armed strength was essential as a means of making political positions credible, as a deterrent to attack, as a source of encouragement to allies, and, as a last resort, as a means of waging war successfully should war come."¹¹ Since China fell to

⁹ Andrew S. Erickson and Andrew R. Wilson, "China's Aircraft Carrier Dilemma," *Naval War College Review*, 59 (Autumn 2006): 29.

¹⁰ Bernard D. Cole, *The Great Wall at Sea* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2001), 30-53.

¹¹ John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 39.

the Communists in 1949, Seventh Fleet has been called upon many times through the decades to provide a credible deterrent against PRC ambition.

The Cold War ended in 1991 with the collapse of the Soviet Union and through the success of containment strategies involving military posturing and presence. Nevertheless, the PRC remains Communist in name and Totalitarian in practice. A minority within the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) still strictly govern the population of China and its powerful economy. They alone decide the course of the PRC. Additionally, the PRC possesses a more powerful and capable military than was seen during the 40 years of the Cold War. With China as a frontrunner in globalization, the containment strategy of the Cold War will no longer be effective.

The PRC can threaten regional stability and the world with its forces. This growing threat adds credence to increased U.S. show of force operations in the region to maintain stability and ensure the continued flow of maritime commerce. Show of force operations have proven effective against many of America's adversaries in the past including China in 1996 during the Taiwan Strait crisis.

ANALYSIS (RED)

It is important to identify the PLAN's operational center of gravity (COG) and exploit the critical vulnerabilities surrounding it (figure 1). The PLAN's strategic objectives are to support PRC interests by defending their controversial maritime territorial claims in the ECS and SCS to include Taiwan.

The PLAN's operational objectives include invasion and then defense of the Spratly Islands, Taiwan, and the Senkaku Islands. The PLAN's critical strengths for invasion and defense of these territories are: proximity to the objectives, their numerical superiority of

ground forces, their large ballistic missile inventory, their submarines, their DDG's, their national will, their technical skill, and their growing defense budget. The PLAN's critical weaknesses are: lack of an effective command and control structure, lack of effective combined arms training, poor interfleet coordination, a lack of an aircraft carrier, a lack of allies in the region, and the inability to conduct large scale operations.¹²

The PLAN's operational COG would be its ability to project ground forces onto these maritime claims and to hold them indefinitely. Their critical capabilities include: their operational command and control (C2) at fleet headquarters, their amphibious forces, their air defenses to include missiles and aircraft, their ballistic missile forces, and their surface defenses to include ships and submarines.

Critical requirements for these critical capabilities are: effective communications between forces to include computers, antennas, and command posts, amphibious doctrine and training, combined arms training and coordination, mid-air refueling for aircraft, and reliable weapons technology.

Finally, the PLAN's critical vulnerabilities include: operational planning and operational art, poor communications capabilities through stovepiped C2 structures, and lack of experience in combined arms training. For a show of force operation where U.S. forces can only employ non-kinetic effects, there remain several courses of action to target these critical vulnerabilities and demonstrate U.S. ability and resolve to defeat PLAN forces.¹³

¹² Bernard D. Cole, *The Great Wall at Sea* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2001), 69.

¹³ Ibid.

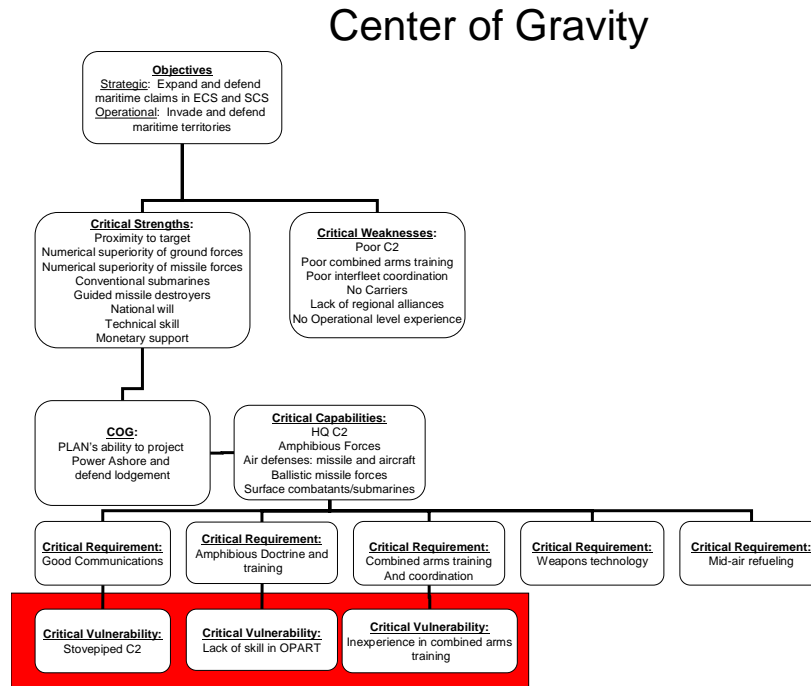


Figure 1

PRC higher education has strictly focused on engineering and science.¹⁴ PLAN officers are developing their skills required to become good tactical officers and Communists. They lack a depth of education, however, in military history, political science, and the other liberal arts facets that lead to the skills needed for operational art. This is due, partially, to the PRC's concern in liberalizing education, especially in their PLA officers. This is out of the notion that they might challenge the current Communist establishment. There is also a push for more technical education in order to be competitive in research and development facets of economic and military growth.¹⁵

Operational planning and organization remain centralized. Strategic decisions are made only by the CCP leaders in close coordination with PLA leadership in Beijing.¹⁶

¹⁴ Thomas L. Friedman, *The World is Flat: A Brief History of the 21st Century* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 2005), 272.

¹⁵ Ibid., 267.

¹⁶ Bernard D. Cole, *The Great Wall at Sea* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2001), 69.

Operational planning decisions are made at PLAN headquarters in Beijing before individual fleets are directed to execute. This centralized leadership is part of the critical vulnerability of stovepiped C2 surrounding the operational COG.

The individual fleets remain very centralized and normally function independently from one another. Naval communities such as the subsurface, surface, air, amphibious, and marine corps communities remain stovepiped in their training, administration, and their employment doctrines. Amphibious exercises, for example, are conducted almost exclusively in the SCS without coordination with South Sea Fleet (SSF) air or subsurface units, let alone coordination with units from the East Sea Fleet (ESF). “Each fleet obviously is commanded by a different admiral, faces different strategic and operational environments, and deploys different ships and aircraft.”¹⁷ Again, this stovepiped C2 system is a critical vulnerability that impacts the performance of the operational COG.

THE OPERATION (BLUE)

Coordinating jointly with other services and other nations in the region as a Combined Task Force (CTF), Seventh Fleet could leverage aspects of Information Operations (IO) (Psychological Operations (PSYOP), Military Deception (MILDEC), and Operational Security (OPSEC)) and additional conventional forces.¹⁸ U.S. Pacific Command supported show of force operations would serve to develop U.S. capabilities in this regard and deter PRC regional ambitions. With proper planning, Seventh Fleet may be able to respond within days to any potential crisis in the region using show of force operations to further deter PRC ambition.

¹⁷ Bernard D. Cole, *The Great Wall at Sea* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2001), 128.

¹⁸ U.S. Department of Defense, *Joint Publication 3-13* (Washington, DC: Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 13 February 2006), ix.

The aim of this show of force operation would be to deter the PLAN from invading and holding disputed maritime territorial claims in the East and South China Seas. This operation would require the involvement of the U.S. Pacific Fleet, as well as participation of joint and coalition forces. U.S. Forces would have to limit actions so as not to escalate tensions, but still send a clear signal of defiance and determination to the PLAN and the PRC government. To this end, this operation will rely heavily upon IO in coordination with military operations to intensify the effect of the operation.

The commander would use IO to direct the information campaign to influence the target audience of the PLAN leadership in the East Sea Fleet (ESF) and South Sea Fleet (SSF) headquarters. The objective is to influence them to rethink their military strategies and seek peaceful means to their goals. By confusing their ability to conduct effective C2 and masking U.S. force movements through OPSEC and MILDEC, PLAN leadership may be deterred. CTF maritime component ships will transmit the CTF's capability to conduct operational art to the PLAN forces through a series of high frequency (HF) broadcasts on military frequencies. A series of IO actions can exploit PLAN C2 gaps using the dispersed nature and the momentum of the operation discussed below to confuse their C2 further using HF broadcasts to both ESF and SSF headquarters simultaneously.

The objective of this operation is to deter PLAN ambitions against Taiwan, the Spratly Islands, and the Senkaku Islands by: demonstrating U.S. resolve to intervene, U.S. ability to move and mass forces swiftly at the operational level of warfare, and by promoting cooperation among coalition partners. The desired end state would be for the PRC to abandon their operational objectives of regional maritime expansionism and choose a peaceful course of action.

The operational idea would employ MILDEC by feeding the PLAN false intelligence, employing feints and using unusual approaches to the area of operations, overwhelming mass of joint and allied forces, and a clear, unified message of U.S. resolve broadcasted to the PLAN via HF. This would leave them unable to respond quickly at the operational scale, overwhelm PLAN C2, and underscore their inability to conduct effective combined arms tactics. This show of force operation would also demonstrate to regional powers that U.S. capabilities make the United States a more reliable regional partner over the PRC.

The area of operations (figure 2) would encompass the ECS and the SCS coming within a few miles of PRC territorial seas along the coastline and around the Paracel Islands in the SCS. This area of operations will have the added effect of underscoring freedom of navigation in the area of operations. The area of interest would include the PRC mainland down to the Strait of Malacca. PRC closure areas, notices to airmen, and notices to mariners would be strictly regarded during this operation.

U.S. forces would involve most of the Seventh Fleet, including the USS BLUE RIDGE (LCC 19), the carrier strike group (CSG), and the expeditionary strike group (ESG). Three additional CSG's and one ESG would be needed. Also, one brigade combat team (BCT) of U.S. Army airborne forces would be requested. Additionally, one squadron of Air Force C-17 transports, one squadron of F/A-22 strike fighters, and three B-2 bombers would be requested.

Coalition forces would include: Japanese Maritime Self Defense Force (JMSDF) Aegis ships, submarines, and P-3's, Philippine ground forces and patrol boats, Malaysian, Singaporean, Thai, and Indonesian surface combatants and Australian submarines, surface combatants, and ground forces. Coalition support would require Philippine forward

operating bases in Subic Bay and Clark AB in addition to normal basing and law of the seas access with coalitions in the region. A combined C2 structure would be preferred in order for the operation to be effectively swift and maneuverable.

It will take time to get forces into the area of operations. The longer the time for movement, the more likely it is for forces to be detected by PRC intelligence. Thorough planning among forces is required and C2 needs to be in place before operational maneuver can begin to aid in the operational tempo, OPSEC, and safety of coalition forces. The operation would be intended to last four to seven days, but branches and sequels should be written into the plan and agreed upon by participants.

The operation would employ selected principles of war such as mass, maneuver, tempo, deception, and surprise to essentially catch the PLAN leadership off guard as to the operational scale, speed, and level of coordination. OPSEC would be essential for this operation to successfully achieve MILDEC. Not all partners would know all the details.

The commander would employ OPSEC to disguise the fact that this is more than a typical, annual exercise in the eastern portion of the ECS between the JMSDF and the USN. Meanwhile, as JMSDF and U.S. forces moved into position for the exercise in the ECS, the remaining maritime component forces would bypass traditional sea lines of communication normally monitored by the PRC government to advance into the SCS area of operations undetected.

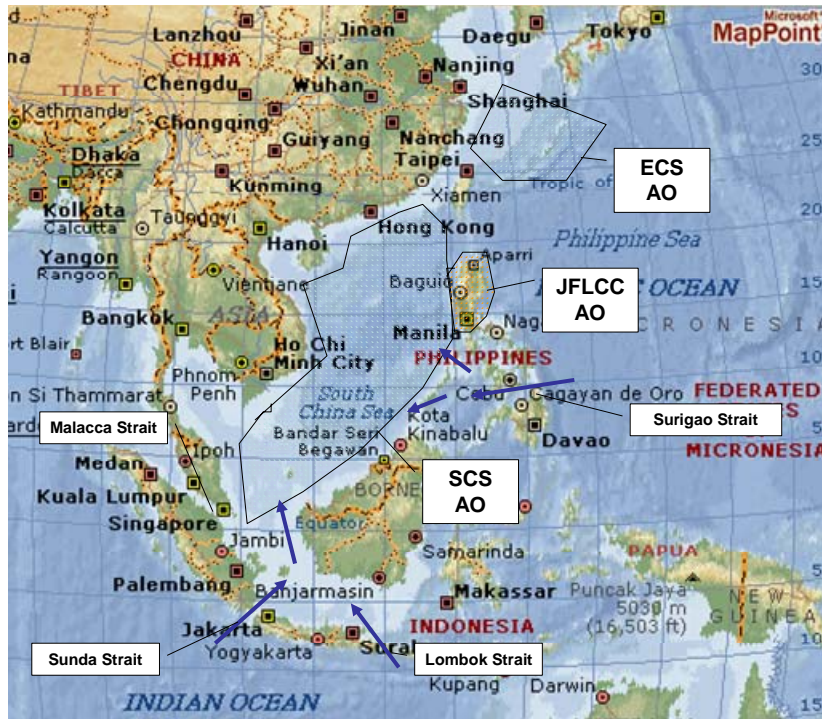


Figure 2 ¹⁹

Land component forces and elements of the air component would then arrive in Luzon in the Philippines to conduct a large-scale combined arms demonstration to include the insertion of airborne forces, close air support, and air to air engagements.

Once all the forces were in place, all units would begin regular broadcasting. HF broadcasts would commence simultaneously from participating units within the CTF. Again, these broadcasts would be directed to the military targets of ESF and SSF headquarters and the leadership found there. The IO would relay superior air, land, and sea combined arms capabilities via these HF broadcasts. The broadcasts would underscore coalition abilities to counter PLAN forces at sea and ashore.

The resulting show of force operation would range from the Strait of Malacca in the SCS to the southern tip of Kyushu in Japan. ECS forces would conduct anti-surface warfare,

¹⁹ Microsoft Encarta 2007, "East Asia," <http://encarta.msn.com/encnet/features/mapcenter/map.aspx?refid=701516672> (accessed on 07 April 2007).

anti-submarine warfare, and mine warfare operations demonstrating the CTF's ability to defeat PLAN forces. The HF broadcasts would address these various capabilities to counter any attempts at anti-access by PLAN ESF forces. SCS forces would conduct similar operations with a similar IO focus during the HF broadcasts. Operational momentum for this operation needs to be maintained for the duration of the operation initially planned from four to seven days.

The show of force operation would be tied together using a common IO plan that directly targets the critical vulnerabilities of poor operational art, poor C2, and lack of effective combined arms training by demonstrating U.S. and coalition capabilities in these areas. The desired effect would be a loss in confidence in the PLAN leadership's ability to project power ashore in maritime territories and then defend them. This would be ascertained in the follow-on assessment phase of the IO plan.

An unpredictable pattern of show of force operations that employ the key elements of MILDEC, OPSEC, operational maneuver, and tempo will challenge PLAN assumptions on their capabilities and current readiness. The goal is to deter the PRC from military options to more peaceful courses of action. Show of force operations can have the added benefit of developing a constructive dialogue among coalition partners.

COUNTERARGUMENTS

There are several counterarguments to a show of force operation like the one described. First, it may have the indirect effect of causing calls for independence in Taiwan and in regions within the PRC. Second, some would perceive such operations as being too confrontational with the PRC and may escalate to war. Third, such operations may

undermine the global economy. Finally, the PRC has a right to a military and to use it for defense.

In addressing the first counterargument, there is always a fear of regional destabilization in East Asia. The internal situation in the PRC is no exception. The PRC fears internal instability in regions like Taiwan, Tibet, and Xinjiang Uygur. Threats of Taiwanese independence, for example, is considered a direct threat to the legitimacy of the ruling CCP. If such independence was permitted, there are fears that the other outer regions of China would follow causing the eventual collapse of the PRC government. This is not necessarily in the U.S. national interest. Maintaining the status quo between the mainland and Taiwan is the current U.S. national interest and as such is supported by U.S. Pacific Command and its components.²⁰

The message from U.S. Department of Defense and the U.S. Department of State to the current regime in Taiwan should be one of restraint and reinforcing the status quo. Taiwan would not be allowed to be a part of the planning process or to be a member of the coalition. Additionally, the protection of Taiwan should not be specifically identified as an objective of the show of force operation, but a more general operation to defend against PLAN offensive operations. Therefore, this posture would maintain the status quo by protecting Taiwan from amphibious assault but not officially identifying them as a potential objective of allied show of force operations.

The second counterargument states that this show of force operation will escalate to war with the PRC. This operation will strictly adhere to international law. It will observe all closure areas, territorial seas, and respect the passage of commercial vessels and non-

²⁰ U.S. Department of Defense, *The Military Power of the People's Republic of China* (Washington, DC: Office of the Secretary of Defense, 2005), 1.

participants. The operation may call for closure areas, notices to airmen, and notices to mariners but will strictly follow range clearance procedures. The U.S. Department of State will open all diplomatic channels and be receptive to PRC reactions and demarches. In short, every effort will be made to respect the PRC's internationally recognized claims while conducting freedom of navigation operations. Any decision to escalate this operation will be solely on the shoulders of the PRC leadership. It is likely, however, that the operation will be over (four to seven days in length) before any reaction or escalation could take place. Additionally, this operational plan would have several branches and sequels to offset any attempt to escalate by the PLAN and the PRC government.

The third counterargument considers more of the global economic damage a confrontation between the U.S. and the PRC in East Asia might have. On the contrary, this operation is designed to counter the PRC's regional maritime ambitions, which should actually have the opposite effect. Show of force operations should improve the regional markets and, in turn, the global economy. U.S. aircraft carrier presence has been proven in the past to improve the health of stock markets and the global economy.²¹

If the PRC was allowed to achieve their strategic objectives in the East China and South China Seas then stock markets around the globe would come crashing down. Such was the case in 1996 when the PRC demonstrated their resolve against Taiwan using a missile demonstration into closure areas off of Taiwan.²² Two aircraft carriers in the Taiwan Strait were able to return the region to stability both militarily and economically. "Never did

²¹ Robert Looney, "Market Effects of Naval Presence in a Globalized World," in *Globalization and Maritime Power*, ed. Sam J. Tangredi et al. (Washington, DC: National Defense University, 2002), 103-104.

²² U.S. Department of Defense, *The Military Power of the People's Republic of China* (Washington, DC: Office of the Secretary of Defense, 2005), 15.

Beijing more directly feel the effectiveness of aircraft carriers as political instruments.”²³

Therefore, show of force operations such as the one described could actually be beneficial to the global economy as a demonstration of stability.

As far as the fourth counterargument, the PRC, as well as any nation on Earth, is entitled to organize, train, and equip an armed force in order to defend themselves from would be aggressors. The PRC already has a force capable of defending themselves. Today, however, the PLAN, under the direction of the CCP, is developing offensive combat power that will allow it to project power outside its territorial boundaries. The offensive force will be used to defend its national interests and not just its territorial boundaries.

These national interests, derived from the ruling CCP, will not necessarily be the same as U.S. national interests and may ultimately lead these nations into a confrontation in East Asia as well as other regions of the world. “China aspires to a day when the South China Sea will become, in effect, a Chinese lake and will be accepted as such internationally.”²⁴ Show of force operations will reinforce U.S. national resolve in the region without the PRC having to abandon their right to self defense. The ultimate goal should be one of peaceful cooperation between all the powers in East Asia. U.S. Pacific Command and its components, including U.S. Pacific Fleet and Seventh Fleet, endeavor to achieve that goal.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, there is a danger of PRC national interests challenging U.S. national interests in East Asia if the PRC military buildup in the region goes unchecked and unchallenged. The PLAN is quickly developing into a formidable force that cannot be ignored. If the PLAN is able to exercise sea denial, sea control, and power projection using

²³ Bernard D. Cole, *The Great Wall at Sea* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2001), 147.

²⁴ Marvin C. Ott, “Southeast Asian Security Challenges: America’s Response?,” *Joint Force Quarterly*. Second Quarter 2007, 19.

amphibious forces in East Asia, the U.S. may lose its ability to maintain forward naval presence in the region and some of its legitimacy with its regional partners and allies. If the region shifts to PRC influence, then PLAN forces may move to project power into the Indian Ocean, Africa, and the into the Pacific to challenge U.S. national interests in those regions as well.

Show of force operations of the scale and tempo as the one described will aid in maintaining U.S. presence and demonstrating U.S. resolve to remain the force to be reckoned with in East Asia. This operation would demonstrate U.S. military capabilities to bring the fight to the PRC's doorstep and challenge their ambitions in the ECS and SCS. These operations would also demonstrate to allies in the region that the United States will remain committed to East Asia to ensure long term stability.

The PRC should be allowed to peacefully rise and become an active partner in world affairs. Nevertheless, they should remain aware that the United States is keeping vigil and retains the tools and alliances to ensure global security. In East Asia, U.S. Pacific Command and its components can reinforce that security through show of force operations.

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